

# SPINSTERIZATION OF WOMEN OR SPINSTER WOMEN IN THE ARAB WOMEN'S LITERATURE: AN IMPOSED REALITY OR A REJECTED CHOICE? HAYFĀ' BAYṬĀR'S NOVEL, *NISĀ' BI AQFĀL/ WOMEN IN LOCKS*, AS A SAMPLE<sup>1</sup>

DR. HANAN BISHARA

*The Academic Arab College for Education in Israel – Haifa*

## ABSTRACT

*This study deals with the subject of spinsterhood and forced spinsterization in modern Arab society. It describes the status of spinsters as reflected in the novel of Nisā' bi Aqfāl/ Women in Locks by the Syrian writer Hayfā' Bayṭār. The general image of the spinsters is negative. The reasons for spinsterhood are cultural, historical, religious, economic and patriarchal beliefs. Besides, there is a shortage of literary studies on the subject, and most studies in the field deal with the issue from a social point of view only. Most writers, mainly male writers, avoid dealing with this issue due to its social sensitivity.*

*The significance of the study lies in its contribution to this less dealt with the issue in the literary studies of Arabic literature. The originality of this research lies in its being a pioneering investigation in a serious feminist issue in the Arab world, which originates from injustice and inequality between men and women. The novel of Nisā' bi Aqfāl constitutes a revolution against the social reality, and the religious patriarchal authority that subjugated the spinsters and the traditions that shackles them.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Spinsterhood, Taboos, Unconsciousness, Insensitivity, Poetry & Literature*

**Received:** Aug06, 2021; **Accepted:** Aug 26, 2021; **Published:** Sep 18, 2021; **PaperId.:** IJELDEC202114

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The novel is a narrative genre of prose that has become open to life, its changes, and its dynamics. It also has the ability to seek help from a lot of artistic, literary, and cultural components that fall in a parallel area to it and integrate them into its body. This has made it noticeable in all national and international literature and languages. The novel, specifically, as the American writer Susan Sontag says, struggles against the dryness that people feel, no matter what the type, form, and time of dryness is. It is a story that adopts 'narration' including description, dialogue, and conflict between the characters, besides the crisis, tension, argument, and events that the narration entails. The novel describes imaginary characters and events in the form of a serial story. It is also the largest narrative genre from the point of view of size, multiplicity of characters, and variety of events<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.1 Spinsterhood as a Term

<sup>1</sup> Bayṭār', Hayfā' (2008). *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Algeria: al-Dar al-'Arabiya li al-'Ulūm. Mansurat al-Ikhtilaf. (Hayfā' Bayṭār is a Syrian optician and novelist, who was born in (1960) in Latakia. She is also a critic and essayist. Her first work was published in 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Sontag, Susan (1966). *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. pp. 185.

"Spinsterhood" is a sophisticated and controversial term. Some people support and accept the term, considering it as a term that reflects one of the psychological and social problems that exist in all societies. Other people oppose the use of this term because they think that it decreases the value of the people who are described or stigmatized with it.

Though the term 'spinsterhood' is a descriptive one that applies to both sexes, males and females, the culture of the Arab societies focus on the female 'spinsterhood' more than on the male 'spinsterhood'. They consider it a reality that is imposed on women in most cases and it is not an optional thing. Besides, it is connected to the age of women's fertility and giving birth, while in the case of men, it is mostly optional.

Spinsterhood from the sociological perspective means that the male and the female grew beyond the age of marriage according to the common norm, and that they missed the train of married life, and they did not enter life because life in people's norm is the wedlock<sup>3</sup>.

## 1.2 Spinsterhood among Classical Arab Poets

Spinsterhood of the woman among the Arab poets was represented in samples from Arabic literature in different ways. For example, al-'Asha<sup>4</sup> distinguished between the girl, the spinster, and the laughing woman.

يَوْمَ قَفَّتْ حُمُولُهُمْ فَتَوَلَّوْا قَطَعُوا مَعَهْدَ الْخَلِيطِ فَشَاقُوا  
حُرَّةً طِفْلَةً الْأَنَامِلِ كَالذَّمِيَّةِ لَا عَانِسٍ وَلَا مِهْزَاقٍ

The remarkable thing in this quotation is al-Asha's robbery of the 'spinster' and the 'mihzaq' /'laughing one' of their freedom and granting it to the baby girl. He actually makes her like a 'doll' as a sign of her beauty, tenderness, and young age.

Besides, the term 'spinster' is used to refer to 'wine' in several lines of Arabic poetry. Probably, reference to 'wine' as a 'spinster' refers to 'mind corruption'. It seems that they also saw the 'spinster' as a mindless woman. Ibn Tabataba<sup>5</sup> the Alawite said:

مَخْدَرَةٌ مَكْنُونَةٌ قَدْ تَكْشَفَتْ كَرَاهِيَةَ بَيْنِ الْجِسَانِ الْأَوَانِسِ  
مُشْعِشَةً مَرَهَاءَ مَا جَلَّتْ إِنِّي أَرَى مِثْلَهَا عِذَاءً فِي زِيٍّ عَانِسِ

Al-Buhturi<sup>6</sup>, however, sees in her a bad omen and that she is ugly:

قَدْ قُلْتُ لِلْمَسْدُودِ فِي عَانِسٍ شَوْهَاءَ، بِضَحِيٍّ وَهُوَ صَبَّ بِهَا

The spinster for Ibn al-Rumi<sup>7</sup> is associated with old women who are associated with weakness, helplessness, and change in their physical and mental conditions. He said:

عَانِسٌ تَقْهَرُ الشَّبَابَ عَجُوزٌ بِنْتُ قَرْنٍ مِنَ الزَّمَانِ وَقُرْنٍ

<sup>3</sup> 'Ubeid, Mansur al-Rifa'i (2000). *Al-'UnusaRu'yalJtima'iya li HallMushkilat al-Fatah al-'Anis*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: Dar FikrArabi, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>The poem "يَوْمَ قَفَّتْ حُمُولُهُمْ فَتَوَلَّوْا قَطَعُوا مَعَهْدَ الْخَلِيطِ فَشَاقُوا" by al-'Asha, Qays bin Maymun bin Qays. He was called al-'Asha because he was visually impaired. He belongs to the first-class poets in Jahiliya.

<sup>5</sup> The poem "مَخْدَرَةٌ مَكْنُونَةٌ قَدْ تَكْشَفَتْ كَرَاهِيَةَ بَيْنِ الْجِسَانِ الْأَوَانِسِ" by Abu al-Hasan Ibn Tabataba.

<sup>6</sup> The poem: "قَدْ قُلْتُ لِلْمَسْدُودِ فِي عَانِسٍ شَوْهَاءَ" by al-Buhturi.

<sup>7</sup>The poem "لَوْ دَرَى كَيْفَ مَوْقِعِ الْعَذْلِ مِنِّي" by Ibn al-Rumi. He lived in the Abbasid period.

Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri<sup>8</sup> had a negative outlook at the spinster. For him, she is an old girl whose black hair mixed with her white hair:

مَهْرُتُ الْفَتَاةِ الْأَحْمَسِيَّةِ نَثْرَةً عَلَى أَنَّ أَقْرَانِي غَضَابُ أَحْلَامِ  
مُعَيَّسَةً إِنْ جَاءَهَا الرَّمَحُ خَاطِبًا سَقَتْهُ دُعَافَ الْمَوْتِ شَمَطَاءُ عَانِسِ

We have introduced here a few samples out of many, as if all the poets had their unilateral viewpoint about the spinster woman. As a result, they gave her a negative image and made her an inactive element as all of them believe that 'spinsterhood' kills the soul and suffocates the emotion. These samples imitate the social, cultural, and epistemological reality that the spinster lives. Thus, the written literature about the spinster turned to be another weapon that is raised against her in order to present her in a negative image.

## 2. THE STUDY: *NISĀ' BI AQFĀL/ WOMEN IN LOCKS*

This study seeks to show the brutality of the look at the spinster on the literary level, which should be more considerate to her, and refuse this bad attitude towards her, and bias against her and her feelings.

### 2.1 The Goal of the Study

The main goal of the study is to discuss the phenomenon of spinsterhood and spinsterization and the status of spinsters in their society as it is reflected in modern Arabic literature.

### 2.2 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in raising the readers' awareness and society in general about the psychological suffering of spinsters in their daily life and make a positive change in people's attitudes about spinsters in Arab society.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The novel of *Nisā' bi Aqfāl/Women with Locks* sheds light on the problem of spinsterhood in the Arab world and the dimensions that it constitutes besides the crisis of the social values that put on the woman unbearable burdens. Hayfā' Bayṭār introduces in her novel types of women who missed the train of marriage and turned into symbols of failure in life as society describes them. Bayṭār challenges the phenomenon of spinsterhood in her novel by introducing samples of women who grow beyond the commonly accepted age for marriage, and as a result, they become victims in their oriental society. Hayfā' Bayṭār tries to reveal the spinster's suffering and the defeats that accompany her condition, which are caused by the social environment and social traditions that surround the spinster and make her an introverted person.

The writer enters the depth of that condition through her psychological analyses of Dr. Hanādy, who sought to submit a thesis about this female social sector through a personal experience that she exploited and employed in order to submit her study in this field.

The novel starts with a touching story about Nādyā's character, the teacher who had no luck like other girls in finding a man to marry her and 'protect' her from people's looks and a closed society that sees the woman who has no husband as an incomplete one. Nādyā's friends are: Sanā', Taghrīd, Du'ā', Jūlie, Hāla, Amāl, and psychologist Hanādy.

---

<sup>8</sup>The poem "مَهْرُتُ الْفَتَاةِ الْأَحْمَسِيَّةِ نَثْرَةً" Mahartu al-fatah al-ahmasiyanathratan" by Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri. He lived in the Abbasid period.

However, Julie, who is free from the burdens of her society, rebels against its traditions, wanders with her freedom, but does not find love after her society rejects her.

**Du'a'**, who isolated herself like a nun in order to dismiss the woman's natural need, becomes a dead body at the end, unconscious and senseless; **Hāla**, the customs clearer who is forced to sleep with a young man who works at her office and consumes him like a commodity that satisfies her instinct; and **Amāl**, who puts an end to the hell of her life with a decision of committing suicide after she lost her fiancé in a car accident. The psychologist **Hanādy**, who wrote about them in her thesis.

These are samples of women who entered the world of spinsterized by force and were disappointed. They decided to enter the world of 'sex' after they lost hope in finding a husband

Houriya Āgbāl says about spinsterization, namely, forced spinsterhood: 'forced spinsterhood' refers to spinsterhood that is imposed by one side of society on the male and female alike. Its reason is attributed to several economic, social, and cultural, sometimes, family circumstances. For example, the father imposes on his daughter and forces her to marry this or that, and thus, she finds herself in the shadow of spinsterhood.

Her education can also be a cause of her spinsterhood when she finds herself obliged to continue her studies, and consequently, she misses the age of marriage<sup>9</sup>.

It should be pointed out here that there is also 'optional spinsterhood', which can be attributed to the girl herself which result from her exaggerated conditions regarding her future husband, or her absolute refusal to get married and preference to be independent<sup>10</sup>.

Hayfā' Baytār puts the issue of spinsterhood under her fictional microscope so that this novel will become a mirror that reflects the ghost of spinsterhood, where the woman who has crossed the commonly agreed upon age is crossed.

According to the novel, the spinster lady is stigmatized socially as a 'spinster', and is accused after that by 'deviation'<sup>11</sup>. With regard to the relationship between stigma of 'deviation'<sup>12</sup> of the spinster, Jamal Ma'tuq argues that "stigma" is considered a negative mental image that sticks to a certain individual that expresses resentment to and surprise at this individual, which exists in our society, and it touches the majority of society individuals with resentment and

<sup>9</sup> Āgbāl, Houriya (2007). *Wāqī' al-'Unusa fi al-Mujtama' al-Jazā'iri*, An M.A. Thesis. The Faculty of Humanities. Algeria, p. 68. For detailed information about spinsterhood in religions, social and sociological thought, see: Sādo, Houriya (2011), "Wāqī' al-'Uzuba al-Nasawiya in Algeria". A thesis submitted as partial fulfillment for her Ph.D. degree in Family Social Sciences, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Jaballa, Yamina & al-Hashimi, Lukya (2007). "Ma'na al-Ḥayawa' Ala qatua bi al-Iḥtiq al-Nafsilada al-Mar'a al-'Āmila al-Ānis. An M.A. thesis. University of Baskara. Algeria, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Sulaymani, 'Alā' defines "al-waṣm الوصم" as follows: "Waṣm" means: giving undesired names by other people to the individuals in such a way that deprives him of being accepted socially because he is a different person, physically, mentally psychologically, and socially, which makes him feel lose his psychological and social balance, Sulaymani, 'Alā' (1997). 'Ala Namaṭ al-Waṣm wa Nata'ijuhu fi Mintaqat Makka al-Mukarramah. An M.A. thesis. Al-Zaqaziq University. Cairo: p. 38-41.

<sup>12</sup> It is possible to define the concept of social deviation as a behavior that is not committed to the rules of accepted social standards by a large number of the group or the local or general public. Deviation, in general is non-commitment to all the rules that society defined and are fulfilled by its individuals. For more information, see: Yankin, Mitchell (1986). *Mu'jam Ilm al-Ijtima'* (1984). Tr. by Ihsan Mohammad al-Hasan. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a. p. 73.

According to Samia Jaber, the stigmatized person faces several social and psychological problems that are caused by the others that make him find difficulties in adjusting to them due to the inferiority look with which his society look at him. Here lies the relationship between the stigmatizing side and the stigmatized side, and out of this relationship deviation of the stigmatized person appears<sup>14</sup>.

In my view, and in light of what has been said above, there is an interactive relationship between 'stigma', and the 'deviation' of the spinster which occurs through society's ignorance and contempt to her because she did not have any opportunity to get married, which might push her to have some deviational behavior.

The pressing events that the spinster lives in this age-stage raises the average frustration, which appears in psychological confusions that lead, in turn, to behavioral deviational confusions that are represented in immoral relations such as a 'befriending' and 'dating' with a boyfriend<sup>15</sup>.

With regard to deviation and immoral decay of the spinster, Shams al-Din Borobisays: It is one of the most dangerous things that spinsterhood can cause. Its effects appear on the spinster and society. Some of these effects include: prostitution, adultery, and "flesh trade", whose results include: sexual diseases, illegitimate children, increase in abortion, family collapse, and poverty<sup>16</sup>.

Finally, 'Ādel Fawzi's definition of 'spinsterhood' constitutes the best reply to the justifications and clarifications to the violence that some people connect to the spinster's condition: spinsterhood is a marginalized condition and it is rejected by both society and parents, though it is hard to accept by the individual who lives it whether the spinster is a man or a woman<sup>17</sup>.

In her novel *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, Hayfā' Baytār describes the spinsters' suffering in their human dimension in the shadow of an unfair social mentality against the woman. Besides, it also highlights a list of taboos that the woman is exposed to in a traditional male culture, whose hardest taboo is related to 'love' and 'freedom'.

Hayfā' Baytār is the first writer who introduces the problematics of the woman's middle-age, and the unjust view about fifty-years old

For example, it is quite ordinary for a fifty-year old man to think about marrying a young lady who is about half his age, which is blessed and acceptable.

*Nisā' bi Aqfāl* is a novel of shaking and refusal of social and intellectual concepts of fifty years old women. Through the "spinsters' group", we know about the life experience of every woman. The age of 'fifty' is the age of disappearance of illusions and emancipation from the slavery of her sexual instinct.

Thus, the women suffer in this novel from two identical pains: *first*, a social religious pain that rapes them with its taboos, and *second*, an internal psychological pain that is penetrated by the crisis of loneliness and ruin that the woman

<sup>13</sup>Ma'tyuq, Jamal (2020). *Madkhal Socioloia al- 'Unfwa al- 'Ulm al-Jina'i*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Hadith, p. 316.

<sup>14</sup>Jaber, Samia (1990). *Al-Fikr al-Ijtima'i*. Alexandria: Dar al-Ma'rafa al-Jami'ia. P. 187.

<sup>15</sup>Bin 'Issa, Amāl (2008). *Daherat al- 'Unusa fi al-Jaza'ir*. Algeria: al-Belaida University, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup>Borobi, Shams al-Din (1998). *"Ta'nis al- 'Awanis", Dala'il al-Khayrat li al-Sawtiyawa al-Mar'iyat*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Algeria, p. 154.

<sup>17</sup>'Ādel, Abdalla (1989-1990). *Formation in du Lien Conjugal et Modeles Familiaux*. Universite de Paris, p. 2.

lives.

The text of the novel provokes the reader and takes his thoughts to various and multiple directions, and the writer has no qualms about exposing the vast quantity of lies that the events of the novel reflect.

The narrative movement starts in *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* by the focal character, Nādyā, the heroine of the novel. Nādyā is a woman who exceeded the age of fifty, and thus, she became in her society's view a 'spinster', who has to be shaded by the family instructions, and devote her life to protect her renown, and take care of her nephew. Nādyā is the woman who started to feel that she has missed the marriage train, and therefore, she raised the flag of rebellion: "at the age of fifty, women tear the virginity of 'silence' and teach its chastity"<sup>18</sup>. Hayfā' Baytār puts the reader in the image so that we can realize the size of pressures that Nādyā is exposed to: "One thousand and one thoughts intersected in Nādyā's mind, and she seemed to inaugurate the greatest revolution in her life. She felt that the crowdedness of thoughts and their conflict is like a battlefield... Enough! Enough! My head will explode because of the pressure of thoughts"<sup>19</sup>. These pressures also include the place. "She stares at the eternal furniture around her; furniture that reminds her of every second in her life, half a century..."<sup>20</sup>.

She rose up from her place, as if the bitter truth has bitten her: "Your age has been lost, Nādyā"<sup>21</sup>. "Nādyā takes her decision to enter a body experience with men whom she met in her life, starting with the X-Ray doctor, who treats her as a commodity, then with her friend's husband, and finally the hairdresser, whose experience with him passes lukewarmly as if he was a tool: "It was a decision that cannot be postponed, like all her previous decisions. From where did that courage come? She summoned all those probable men to her sexual adventure to her mind... she will inaugurate her freedom with one of them"<sup>22</sup>.

Nādyā falls victim to ambiguous feelings between a feeling of 'guilt' and 'enjoyment of the pleasure of discovering the man's body. There, in a room of a woman who was struggling with loneliness and repression, the tape of painful memories moves: "She does not forget at all the first time when her father caught her watching an obscene pornographic movie; a man who was having sex with three lesbian women."<sup>23</sup>

Nādyā despises her father: "Your father will stare at you with a scolding look if he knows that you speak on the mobile with your colleague at work. He reminds you that your honest renown is the basis of your existence and acceptance by the society of hypocrisy, and at night, he looks for his pleasure at sex movies. When he shuts the codes of the channels, you feel exactly that he locks the imaginary chastity belt that strongly presses on your pelvis and between your thighs"<sup>24</sup>.

Mariam Frehat (1995) says: the role of the woman in the Arab society is in the service of the man. She is merely a tool that works in serving the man and securing his comfort, unlike her role in the Western society, where she decides her self-assertion. This service appears clearly in the mother's constant performance of the father's will<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, Nādyā's revolution is against the shackles that tie her in order to prevent her from living her life as she likes:"and out of the several

---

<sup>18</sup>Bitar, Hayfā', *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 5, 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>25</sup>Frehat, Mariam Jaber (1995). *Shakhṣiyat al-Mar'ah fi al-Qiṣa al-Qaṣira fi al-'Urdon*. Irbid: Dar al-Kindi, p.47.

possible men for her sexual revolution, she favored three... the X-Ray doctor, whose clinic she visited three years ago to have an X-ray photo for her breasts in order to be certain about her safety; on that day, he looked at her breasts surprisingly, and said: I do not believe that your age is forty-seven, as your breasts are ones for a twenty year old young girl"<sup>26</sup>. This doctor, who shocked her with his brutality, was talking sweetly in order to crackdown on her like a sexual prey, as he had the weapons that enable him to attack her in this field.

Nādyā felt that at the first moments of their first meeting: "When she entered his office, he smiled a broad smile, knowing that he liked her because he made her feel that he understood the purpose of her visit... he caressed her breasts daringly, and she wondered why he 'invited her to lunch on his farm...' "<sup>27</sup>, while he was treating her like a cheap woman.

That was an insulting experience with all criteria with which, Nadia felt of emptiness: "The only truth that I learned from that experience is that the sexual act is for insult and humiliation"<sup>28</sup>. The second man who jumped to her mind as a possible boyfriend was her hairdresser. She noticed the lustful looks that he used to send her through the mirror: "Once, she intentionally let her hairpin fall down into the opening of her shirt; the hairpin was stuck in the groove between her breasts; he extended his hand to pick it up, but she kept his hand away angrily and said: "I will return it to you"<sup>29</sup>.

The *third* man who came to mind was her friend's husband, whom she divorced because of his repeated betrayals to his wife: "He was a good-looking man, and had a captivating presence; every time he met her, he would say to her: "You, crazy one, live your life and don't care about those sadistic ignorant people who steal your life... sex is an incomparable pleasure; don't deny it to yourself, you're foolish!"<sup>30</sup>

The humiliating images with the doctor and the hairdresser flow onto her memory till she becomes a city that is plowed by airplanes; Nādyā feels sarcastic at her relationship with the man, whom she uses as a tool in her hand to satisfy her body needs.

The question that rises here is this: If Nādyā knows all these sins and blatant negativities and misdeeds that exist specifically in the doctor's self, and this is his behavior, why did she hand him her body and colluded with him in tarnishing her body in his farm?

Freud also says that complexes and nervous psychological components are planted in the soil of unconsciousness since childhood and stay till maturity under the fist of repression and suppression of the two social and unjust religious authorities.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Nādyā, from the beginning, realized what was taking place within her, and she felt that it was social injustice that she should bury her instinct instead of letting it see the light. Therefore, Nādyā feels that she has already started

living in a swirl with her soul and body: "But did that violated sexual relationship blowup all that smashing revolution in

<sup>26</sup>Baytār, Hayfā', *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, p. 10-11.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 13-14.

<sup>31</sup>Freud, Sigmund (2006). *ʿIlm al-Nafs al-JamahīriwaTahlīl al-ʿAna*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Tr. George Tarabishi. Beirut: Dar al-Taliʿa li al-Tibaʿawa al-Nashr, p. 99.

her depths?"<sup>32</sup>.

Nādyā gathers her 'spinster' friends to declare in front of them that she had her first sexual intercourse experience, which turns the whole session into a competition of revelations: "Nādyā invited her friends to dinner at a luxurious hotel on reaching fifty. Her decision was that she would tell them about giving up her virginity by her experience of sexual intercourse ..."<sup>33</sup> so that they alternate narrating their sexual experiences with bitterness that was generated by years of deprivation and falseness that their society tried to plant in their minds as principles and values.

The friends' confessions are introduced alternately; the competition of revelations continues till Sanā reveals her experience with her brother's friend, who deflowered her and then told another friend, who tried to blackmail her so that he can achieve his goal from her: "You will not believe me if I tell you that I decided to enter the experience of the body after I read an article titled '*Ghazal al-Misk/ Ghazelle of Musk*'. when I finished reading this essay, I found myself wondering: who extracted the musk-gland from the human beings? Why did they bring us up fearing 'sex' and consider it 'rotten'?"<sup>34</sup>

Taghrīd also tells her friends how she decided to have her first experience with her childhood friend, who became a well-known personality as a university professor and an ambassador. Here, a specific indicative and suggestive sentence strikes us, when the ambassador says to Taghrīd during their meeting in his suite at a magnificent hotel that she had a body of a twenty years old girl, her reply was only this: "Nothing passed by me except time and the man"<sup>35</sup>. Taghrīd points out her frustration by saying: "He led my hands to catch a trivial extra organ between his thighs; I felt some malignant happiness because he looked embarrassed; I knew the man's organ from the sexual movies that I watch secretly. I cursed my luck and said to myself: it seems that you will exit as a 'Miss' as you entered the suite as 'Mr.' Ambassador"<sup>36</sup>.

Sonia, however, tells her friends how her first sexual adventure was with her colleague at work, and how she started wishing if she could marry him secretly, and she hinted at that to him. He rejected the idea so strongly that she felt humiliated and small before he cut their relationship by repudiating their love dating. Sonia justifies that by claiming that this man suffers from his wife and she calls that suffering a 'Wife Phobia'.

At the end of the meeting, the group remember their absent friend, Dou'ā, who sought shelter in religion and smashed her sex instinct, and deleted from her memory the days of mad sex agitation, seeking to purify her soul: "... the whole world turned in her view into a large bar (= penis)... and felt that her organ was worn as a result of practicing masturbation"<sup>37</sup>.

It is necessary to point out here that the writer excelled in analyzing Dou'ā's character and embodying it in its emotions, thoughts and deliriums. She also succeeded in creating a virtual world that compensates her for a world that she sees mortal and transient, in this way, the writer shows how religion turns into an anti-life power.

With regard to the psychological effects that the spinster is exposed to, Buthayna al-'Iraqi(2008) says: "People's complimentary wishes for her to get married make her escape from facing people and she prefers to live in loneliness or making friendship with those who are of the same age. Therefore, she looks at society with envy and hatred, which she

---

<sup>32</sup>Baytār, Hayfā', *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, p. 34.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 66-76.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 83-84.



Then the novel introduces a new focal character called, Hanādy, a doctorate candidate in Psychological Medicine. Hanādy receives an invitation to attend a conference on spinsterhood. Dr. Hanādy presents a deep study with the title, "Spinsterhood as a Phenomenon That Threatens Society".

The lecture is a psychological study that deals with the phenomenon of 'spinsterhood' in the Arab world and points out the emotional human aspect of the data and the scientific statistics to her teacher, Dr. Nasser, the Dean of the Faculty of Psychiatry to refuse her dissertation and tells her the following: "What you introduced is not a scientific study; what you introduced is something that I do not know what to call it, it is scandalous!"<sup>39</sup>.

Despair occupies her, and she feels disappointment with regard to spinster women who put their trust in her and revealed their depths and ruin that the conference caused to them. The images of Hāla, Amāl, and Jūlie come successively to her mind: "She thought with sorrow that all her enthusiasm to achieve her project about the spinsters' psychological and emotional life was belittled; she felt that she was lost, and as if she did not offer herself for three months in registering unachieved women's specifications; women who were buried in silence and suppression; women who live such a closed life that causes amazement"<sup>40</sup>.

After Hanādi's marriage, which lasts for five years, "the spinsters feel as if they were one woman; and she actually feels united with them. It is true that she got married, but her marriage does not last more than five years, and she finds herself a lonely divorced woman, who has to face a society that stays up caring about her renown day and night..."<sup>41</sup>

Hanādi talks depending on her doctorate dissertation and her expertise in her psychological clinic, about Amāl's suicide, who says in her memoirs: "No man has ever touched me; I am not merely an ordinary virgin, but an ideal case of extreme virginity, as I do not know what a kiss is!"<sup>42</sup> I, who wanted to inaugurate her freedom ā"... and AmWe also read: <sup>42</sup>. by breaking their authority and disappearance from their life, by choosing the ideal action of freedom – death"<sup>43</sup>. Dr. Hanādi tells Hāla's story, who chose when she became forty years old, a boyfriend who is thirteen years younger than her: "I needed that young adulterer to please me... to invade him... to practice with him what I could not practice at all"<sup>44</sup>.

Jūlie, however, says that she is the captain of her ship of pleasure: "... she defied the authority of society and its domination on her life by the act of sex, because 'sex' is 'life' as Jūlie declares without shame"<sup>45</sup>. When Jūlie's sister had a nervous breakdown, we realize that the cause is her discovery of a sinful relationship between her husband and her sister, Jūlie. Jūlie justifies the issue to her psychologist saying: "Do you know, I think that I made a service to my sister, as my relationship that people call 'sinful' with her husband made him become more gentle and delicate with her; he himself admitted to me that after our meetings, he became more lively and more understanding to his wife and children"<sup>46</sup>.

The novel ends after Dr. Hanādy receives a stamped envelope without the name of the sender two days before the

<sup>38</sup> al- 'Iraqi, Buthayna (2008). *al- 'UnusaMakhaterwaAsrar*. Amman: Dar Alfa li al-Nashrwa al-Tawzi', p. 119-120.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 119

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

conference. The envelope has a message. One line of the message refers to a growth of a lesbian relationship between the sender of the message and her partner, after her deprivation from the man and her lust for life. In Dr Hanādy's opinion, suppression among women leads to lesbian relationships, which she considers blessed crimes as long as they take place secretly and not publicly: "We can be anyone of your dissertation's spinsters; we can be any spinster that you did not meet..."<sup>47</sup>.

**Nādyā, the Heroine of the Novel**, is a spinster like her friends. She did not find shelter in her life except through illegitimate relationships, because she found herself deprived of the minimal components of her human existence because she had to live like her friends, in a state of clear smashing of the values of their society, which denied their humanity. Durkeim says that values are one of the instruments of social control that is independent of the selves of the external individuals and their individual embodiments<sup>48</sup>

In my view, Nādyā managed to immerse herself completely in what she was doing and enjoyed it with pleasure and pain at the same time. Her motivations, customs, tendencies, mind, emotions, opinions, beliefs and thoughts, emotions and feelings, and characteristics led to the division of the character into several roles.

Consequently, Nādyā, the heroine did not remain the same one, but turned into the highest sign for criticism of society that is losing itself due to its shackles and worn traditions. She realizes the images of interaction within her, the extent of their ability to express the needs and pressures of the environment, and their effects on her psyche by saying: "You lived stamped and sealed like a bottle of wine for many years; then you decided, too late, to enter life, to taste the men..."<sup>49</sup>

The writer's insistence on describing the stages of a life of many contradictions is attributed to the fact that the heroine lives a state of terrible psychological conflict between 'remembrance and forgetting': "For the first time in her life, she took a decision that stems from her entity only, without interference of anyone else... for the first time, she defies them and blows up their moral arguments in which they imprisoned her all her youth."<sup>50</sup>

What happens to Nādyā was a mini-quake of a confused psychological volcano, of a life of a woman who refuses to surrender, and of a man who refuses defeat in front of a woman, and thus, the conflict intensifies between confused psyches and anxious tempers that are drugged by previous genetic legacies since their childhood growth."His hand was immediately extended in between her thighs; she was startled and quickly kept his hand away; she averted his rough behavior that made her feel how cheap she is and 'free for all'. His fingers returned to infiltrate in between her thighs..."<sup>51</sup>

All these factors that decide the readiness of the soul to respond in a certain direction, did not help in the internal development of the character in the volcano of her spiritual development; actually, she showed the character in a shape of an alienated creature. She said: "It is a shit of an experience, Nādyā, say it openly... when he separated from her, he went quickly to the bathroom; he did not even throw a look at her... she was stunned and amazed and did not absorb what

---

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 160

<sup>48</sup>al-Zayūd, Majed (2006). *al-Shababwa al-Qiyam fi ĀlamMutaghayer*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Amman: Dar al-Shuruq li al-Nashrwa al-Tawzi', p. 120.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

Through this anxious wondering that is accompanied by simultaneous guilt, the character shows its difficulty in achieving its vital goals; and because Nādyā does not feel that she is secure, her feeling of inferiority, despair and loneliness made her move potential psychological powers to compensate that, as Adler maintains. Consequently, the character adopts 'rebellion' as a tool in order to prove itself assert it<sup>54</sup> and to confirm that, we read the following: "When she came out to light, she felt dizzy for a second, and shrank, as if light denuded her depths... she walked like a lost one; the rhythm of her steps repeated the phrase 'You are in the gutter!', 'You are in the gutter!'<sup>55</sup>. Nādyā's rebellion constitutes a self-revelation and emptiness of all the concerns that she lived through the clear dialogue in the novel.

#### 4.THEMATIC, LINGUISTIC AND STRUCTURAL FEATURES

The novel is characterized by the following thematic, linguistic and structural Features:

- Hayfā' Baytār in the novel of this study looks at self-revelation as an existential rescue operation. Spinsters want to practice their original right in life like all women, though they are besieged by a lot of factors of frustration, breakdown, emotional suffocation in the family under the cover of parents' care, and the feeling of nothingness, marginalization in society, and hypocrite religious and social pressures.
- Confession and self-revelation play an important role in the novel. The novel's women who constitute the Association of the Fifty-Year Old Group include the heroine and her friends. They decrease their pains and tragedies by confession and they reach the point of their spiritual ecstasy by saying: "We thank you Nādyā, because you were the most courageous one and you confessed; I need a lotin order to be free of this burden..."<sup>56</sup>.
- After the session of sexual confessions of the spinster women, we read in the novel about the life of frustrated women, who suffer from terrible pain as they have reached the point of deviation. We read about the beauty of the pseudo-masochistic confusions, which the writer depicted in the life of her spinsters; the beauty of the warm, controlled, sensual excitements; the beauty of the human conflicts that express the weakness of the human being; the beauty of narration, and the beauty of the glowing poetic language.
- *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* focuses on the woman's right in practicing *sexual intercourse* and argues that society deprives her from. Society does not respect the woman and sees her as a commodity, or a piece of goods. The novel gives samples of certain models in the West, who practice sex freely because it is their right, and their society does not deny it.
- Hayfā' Baytār also introduces the problem of *sexual suppression* among Arab women. Sometimes, we see the women of the novel living in full negativity and anger, and other times, they live in full challenge. Therefore, Baytā appears to be a wild defender of the woman's body and her right in having sexual experiences like the man, but behind this call, we also discover a deep crisis in the values of the Arab society that treats the woman by the

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> Adler, Alfred (2005). *Al-Tabi'ah al-Bashariya*. Tr. Bushra Najib. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Majlis al-'Ala li al-Thaqafa, p. 80-83.

<sup>55</sup> Baytār, Hayfā', *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

mentality of the slave, who has no right to deal with herself as she likes, even if the woman is an educated one and has got a good mind.

- *Sexual satisfaction* is employed as a novelistic device that makes the heroine talk about the men who passed through her life, and so, the novel becomes a novel of a woman who reads the man's world. The woman has the right to break the silence and disclose what is hidden in her depths, as it is impossible to know the other if he /she does not talk<sup>57</sup>.
- The features of *feminine narration* in *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* are clear and obvious in her attacking of the man. The woman writer excludes him and abolishes his leading role and shows him as a cruel, raping and suppressing the woman. The main roles are given to the woman, and by that, she regains her status and dominates the text as a sign of the woman's attempt to dominate her reality, and emphasizes her refusal to submit to be dependent on the man. She also strengthens her authority and emphasizes her qualification to be the leader and her desire to destroy the man's authority and demolish the prevailing norms in the male institution.
- Hayfā'Baytār rises from the *private* concern to the *public* concern, where she deals with issues that are taken from the women's life in general, in which she expresses their pains. *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*, is an angry cry in the face of the social rules that have destroyed the psychological balance of the spinster women; the Arab woman stands alone and withdraws into alienation with herself.
- *Schizophrenia* extends all over the novel. The writer intended to put the reader in a state of thinking, analysis and justification, and an in advance conclusion to all these facts, which she did not skip over because she had experienced them as a tragic human experience.
- Hayfā'Baytār employed a simple *transparent language style* and in different structures of women characters that have contradictory aspects such as their estrangement with the past that formulated these rebellious characters.
- Hayfā'Baytār introduces an image for the female in its two parts: the *mental* and the *physical*, and in a continuous dialogue about the concept of the complex character and the extent of its internal and external interactions, especially with regard to the sexual experience that mixed with a lived reality and conflict
- The *style of writing* is characterized by the employment of lexical collocations and combination, besides linguistic techniques, thematic motifs, or figurative adjectival imagery that end with the suffix "-iyya" in Arabic. The style can pass from the writer to the reader, which is one of her lexical refrains, which we notice in the writer's repeated employment in plenty of consecutive repetition of exclamations.
- Hayfā'Baytār in *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* employs a lot of queries and wonderings and questions that have no answers, or that their satisfactory answers are buried under the piles of the suffocating, shameful and forbidden taboos.
- It is clear from the novel's *beginning, middle and end*, that Hayfā'Baytār masters her subject matter and its

---

<sup>57</sup>In one of her interviews, Hayfā' Baytār said: "In most of my works, I adopted the issue of the woman in her human dimension, and her relationship with the environment around her, and I did not leave any womanly issue that I have never dealt any issue without diving into its depths to analyze it.

fundamental goal. It is a subject that she mostly observed through her personal experiences in her daily life, her studies, her professional life, and her social life. Her artistic discourse is introduced through her confident, straight, and short sentences, besides her direct narration that is introduced in the *first-person singular pronoun* (I), and the *third person singular pronoun* (he).

- Hayfā' Bayṭār wrote her novel, using the *third person singular pronoun* (he) to describe the spinsters' life, which was smashed by the social and patriarchal taboos. They are spinsters with fragile intentions that look for freedom, emotional and sexual flowering, but they do not find anything except the suffocating smoke of frustration.
- On the linguistic level, Hayfā' Bayṭār introduced a flowing *poetic language*, through which she overcame the length of the narration, which was introduced sometimes by the speaker, Nādyā, through exposing her suffering.
- The *structure* of the novel is well-done and tight, and it introduces characters with visions that invite analysis. The *fictional narrative* is tight, and the events are sequential. Her language is appropriate for the subject, and her description of the characters and progression of time is smooth. The impact of time is well-done. wonderful way.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The female body in the Arab feminist literary movement occupied the narrative fore front. What it sought to achieve is to search and investigate the ladder of the prevailing Arab social and cultural values through which the Arab woman is turned into a weak and inferior creature versus the man and his virility, no matter what his intellectual, moral and financial level is.

Hayfā' Bayṭār depicts in a daring and true way the interiorities of the Arab female, and she writes in a vital language about the concerns that dwell her imagination. In her creative works in general, she deals with a group of subjects that are derived from the depth of the Arab society, especially those that are related to the suffering of the Arab woman. Hayfā' Bayṭār managed, and with a lot of daring, to reveal the hidden and she is considered one of the writers who penetrated the taboo of sex audaciously.

Hayfā' Bayṭār introduces in her novel *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* a serious social problem through a loud cry that she launches, in which she says that the woman remains a prisoner all her years of spinsterhood. At the same time, she has the right as a human creature to satisfy her instincts, especially the sexual one. The sharpness of refusal to the principles of the male world that hates the idea of 'equality' rises in Bayṭār's novel. She also raises her direct accusation to the man's domination. In the novel of the study, there is an indirect call to the man to respect the woman's humanity and not to summarize her into a body or a womb.

*Nisā' bi Aqfāl* is considered a rich novel from various perspectives and it can also raise rich controversy because it raises a lot of questions made by the Arab woman who lives in a hypocritical society that suffers from a cultural and epistemological personality schizophrenia, through duality of a split character and double standards.

In my opinion, this novel can be called '*the novel of spinsters*', if we may say so. It is another description in which we borrow the gifts of the feminine world that surrenders to the injustice of masculinity. It is a novel of torn, shaken, frustrated and challenging characters. The message is that the woman will realize ultimately that breaking the shackles of silence is her only liberator from inferiority, loneliness, insecurity, fear, suspicion, and negative outlook on life and inability to feel pleasant. The novel of *Nisā' bi Aqfāl* is a completion of the revolution of confession and revelation against

social reality, and a religious patriarchal authority that subjugated them, and traditions that shackled them.

The novelty and originality of this research lies in its being a pioneering investigation in a serious feminist issue in the Arab world, which is the forced spinsterhood of Arab girls whose parents keep them unmarried for personal, or materialistic reasons. Besides, there is a shortage of literary studies on the subject, and most studies that have been done on the subject are field studies that deal with the issue from a social point of view. Most writers, mainly male writers, avoid dealing with this issue due to its sensitivity, socially and psychologically.

Finally, the issue of spinsterhood has become very serious in the modern era as a result of the woman's economic and educational freedom, the woman's liberation movement, and her involvement in the globalized world. The study hopes to motivate other researchers to conduct similar studies that deal with the problem of spinsterhood in their societies.

## REFERENCES

1. 'Abdalla, 'Abd al-Mun' em 'Uthman (2005). *Al- 'Unusa: AsbabuhawaAtharuhawa 'Ilajuha*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: Dar al-Afaq al- 'Arabiya. P. 34.
2. 'Adel, Fawzi (1989-1990). *Formation in du Lien Conjugal et ModelesFamiliaux*. Universite de Paris. P. 2.
3. Adler, Alfred (2005). *Al-Ṭabi'ah al-Bashariya*. Tr. by BushraNajib. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: al-Majlis al- 'Ala li al-Thaqafa. P. 80-83.
4. Āgbāl, Huriya (2007). "Waqi' al- 'Unusa fi al-Mujtama' al-Jaza'eri", An M.A. Thesis. The Faculty of Humanities. Algeria. P. 68
5. Bin 'Issa, Amāl (2008). *Ḍaherat al- 'Unusa fi al-Jaza'er*. Algeria: al-Belaida University. P. 7.
6. Bayṭār, Hayfā' (2008). *Nisā' bi Aqfāl*. Algeria: al-Dar al- 'Arabiya li al- 'Ulūm. Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf. P. 57.
7. Borobi, Shams Al-Din (1998). *Tanis al- 'Awanis, Dala'il al-Khayrat li al-Sawtiyawa al-Mar'iyat*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Algeria. P. 154.
8. Fawzi, 'Adel (19980-1990). *Formation in du Lien Conjugal et ModelesFamiliaux*. Universite de Paris.
9. Frehat, Mariam Jaber (1995). *Shakhṣiyat al-Mar'ah fi al-Qiṣa al-Qaṣira fi al- 'Urdon*. Irbid: Dar al-Kindi. P.47.
10. Freud, Sigmund (2006). *'Ilm al-Nafs al-JamāhīriwaTahlīl al- 'Ana*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Tr. George Tarabishi. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a li al-Tib'awa al-Nashr. P. 99.
11. al- 'Iraqi, Buthayna (2008). *Al- 'UnusaMakhaterwaAsrar*. Amman: Dar Alfa li al-Nashrwa al-Tawzi', p. 119-120.
12. Jaballa, Yamina& al-Hashimi, Lukya (2007). "Ma'na al-Haya wa 'Alaqtuha bi al-Ihtiraq al-Nafsilada al-Mar'a al-Amila al- 'Ānis. An M.A. Thesis. University of Baskara. Algeria. P. 45.
13. Jaber, Samia (1990). *Al-Fikr al-Ijtima'i*. Alexandria: Dar al-Ma'refa al Jami'ia. P. 187.
14. Ma'tuq, Frederick (1993). *Mu'jam al- 'Ulm al-Ijtima'ia*. Beirut: Academia. P. 59.
15. Ma'tuq, Jamal (2020). *MadkhalSociologia al- 'Unfwa al-'Ilm al-Jina'i*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al- Ḥadith. P. 316.
16. Mitchel, Yankin (1986). *Mu'jam 'Ilm al-Ijtima'*. Tr. by Ihsan Mohammad al-Ḥasan. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a. p. 73.
17. Sontag, Susan(1966). *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Straus andGiroux. <http://nadyelfikr.net>
18. Sulaymani, 'Alā' (1997). "'Alamat al-WaṣmwaNata'ijuhu fi MintaqatMakka al-Mukarramah". An M.A. Thesis. Al-Zaqaziq University. Cairo: p. 38-41.
19. 'Ubeid, Mansur al-Rifa'i (2000). *Al- 'UnusaRu'yaljtima'ia li Hall Mushkilat al-Fatah al- 'Ānis*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Cairo: Dar Fikr'Arabi.

20. .al-Zayūd, Majed (2006). *Al-Shababwa al-Qiyam fi Ālam Mutaghayer*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Amman: Dar al-Shuruq li al-Nashrwa al-Tawzi ', p. 120.
21. Singh, Archana. "Quest for Identity and Dilemma of Women in Nayantara Sahgal's *Storm in Chandigarh* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*." *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* (2016): 2249-6912.
22. Noushath, M., and T. Charumathy. "Women's Struggling for Survival in Anita Nair's Novels." *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* 6.216: 55-60.
23. Ghosh, Arpita. "Women, Education and the Indian Scenario: A Study of Manju Kapur's Novels." *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)* 3 (2013): 15-22.

